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News Release

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Share! #Durham Emergency Communications Center now accepts photos with 911 texts from @sprint customers

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Durham Now Accepts Photos with 911 Texts from Sprint Customers

First N.C Municipality to Enable Direct Texting with Photos through Sprint

DURHAM, N.C. – Sprint customers have a new way to provide more information to the Durham Emergency Communications Center when they send a text to 911 – they can now attach a photo.

Beginning today, Sprint customers now have the ability to send a photo to the Durham Emergency Communications Center as an attachment to their 911 text. Since 2011, texting to the Durham Emergency Communications has been available for Verizon, AT&T, Sprint, and T-Mobile customers. However, Sprint is the first national carrier to enable its customers to have the ability to attach a photo, making the Durham Emergency Communication Center the only center in North Carolina to offer 911 texting service with photo attachments for Sprint customers.

According to Durham Emergency Communications Center Director James Soukup, sending a photo with a 911 text is encouraged if it aids in a response to an incident. “During a traumatic event, it is often difficult to remember a license plate number, vehicle description, suspect descriptions, and so forth,” Soukup said. “This technology will allow Sprint customers to send a picture with a 911 text to help in these types of incidents.”

According to Soukup, callers should remember that a phone call is still the fastest method to enable a public safety response, but a photo can also be sent as well. “If a photo is available a caller can simply advise they are sending a 911 text with a picture to the 911 operator during the voice call,” Soukup said. “Then, we’ll pass along all of that information during dispatch, which

helps the responding public safety agency be prepared for what they will encounter, or need to look for, upon arrival at the scene.”

Texting technology is specifically designed for two types of emergency scenarios – to help potential victims who don’t want to be heard making a 911 voice call as well as for deaf or hard-of-hearing residents who may be unable to speak to a 911 operator. Sprint customers in Durham should keep the following in mind if they send a text and attach photo to 911:

- Customers should use the texting and attached photo option only when calling 911 is not an option. It can take longer to receive a text message because someone must enter the text, the message then goes through the system, and the 911 operator must read the text and then text back. Picking up the phone and calling 911 is still the most efficient way to reach emergency help. Texting is not always instantaneous, which is critical during a life-threatening emergency.
- Providing location information and the nature of the emergency in the first text message is imperative since the 911 operator will not be able to access the mobile phone location or speak with the person who is sending the text and photo.
- Text abbreviations or slang should never be used so that the intent of the message can be as clear as possible.
- Do not use emoticons or emojis since this will scramble text messages.
- Customers must be in range of cell towers in Durham County. If customers are outside or near the edge of the county, the message may not reach the center.
- Sprint customers must have mobile phones that are capable of sending text messages and taking photos. Any text message to 911 will count either against their messaging plan or be charged in accordance with their wireless plans.
- The texting function should only be used for emergency situations that require an immediate response from police, fire, or emergency medical services. Non-emergency issues should be communicated to the Durham Emergency Communication Center’s non-emergency line at (919) 560-4600.

At this point, Sprint is the only national carrier to offer this service to its customers. According to Soukup, he hopes the other national carriers, such as Verizon, AT&T, and T-Mobile, will soon follow. Customers of non-participating carriers should contact their service providers directly to request this service be provided in their area. To learn more about Durham’s text-to-911 service, email [Soukup](#) or call him at (919) 560-4191.

About the Durham Emergency Communications Center

The [Durham Emergency Communications Center](#) is the primary public safety answering point for the City and County of Durham. Guided by the City's [Strategic Plan](#), the center helps to ensure that Durham is a safe and secure community by providing around-the-clock 911 access and services to the residents and user agencies in and around Durham County. Services include emergency and non-emergency requests for assistance; dispatch of police, fire, and emergency medical services; and other city/county support agencies. The geographic service area encompasses 296 square miles with approximately 250,000 residents. The center has earned the internationally recognized APCO Project 33 Certification from the [Association of Public Safety Communications Officials International, Inc.](#); Emergency Medical Dispatch Accreditation by the [National Academy of Emergency Medical Dispatch](#); and accreditation by the [Commission for Accreditation of Law Enforcement Agencies](#). To learn more, visit the department's [Web page](#) or like on [Facebook](#).

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